

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L OTTAWA 5760

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, CA

SUBJECT: LABOR MINISTER MUNRO CONSIDERS RESIGNATION

1. WUMMARY. LABOR MINISTER JOHN MUNRO HAS TOLD PRESS HE IS ACTIVELY CONSIDERING RESIGNATION FROM CABINET BECAUSE OF "INFERENCES AND ACCUSATIONS" THAT HE IS INVOLVED IN SCANDAL OVER KICKBACKS IN DREDGING CONTRACT FOR HARBOR AT HAMILTON, ONTARIO, MUNRO HAS DISCUSSED RESIGNATION WITH PRIME MINISTER TRUDEAU (WHO LEFT FEBRUARY 26 FOR EUROPE) AND WILL TAKE SEVERAL-DAYS' REST BEFORE DECISION. THOUGH THERE IS NO INDICATION OF EXTENT TO WHICH MUNRO MAY BE INVOLVED, THIS IS PERHAPS FIRST HINT OF ANYTHING RESEMBLING REAL SCANDAL AT CABINET LEVEL SINCE TRUDEAU TOOK OFFICE IN 1968. END SUMMARY.

2. MUNRO HAS BEEN SHARPLY QUESTIONED IN COMMONS, AND ADMITTED THAT RCMP HAS BEEN GIVEN ACCESS TO DOCUMENTS IN HIS OFFICE IN CONNECTION WITH INVESTIGATION INTO HAMILTON HARBOR KICKBACKS. THOSE UNDER INVESTIGATION APPARENTLY INCLUDE SEVERAL PROMINENT HAMILTON LIBERALS, INCLUDING J. LANZA, WHO HAS BEEN CAMPAIGN MANAGER FOR MUNRO IN SEVERAL ELECTIONS. NEITHER OPPOSITION NOR PRESS HAS YET ACCUSED MUNRO OF BEING DIRECTLY INVOLVED, BUT HE HAS OBVIOUSLY BEEN NERVOUS AND UPSET BY QUESTIONING. IN COMMONS, TRUDEAU AND FINANCE MINISTER TURNER HAVE ATTEMPTED STOP QUESTIONS ON GROUNDS ISSUE NOT CONNECTED WITH MUNRO'S POSITION AS LABOR MINISTER, BUT WERE OVERRULED BY SPEAKER JEROME.

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MUNRO WILL PROBABLY NOT APPEAR IN COMMONS FOR SEVERAL DAYS,

BUT QUESTIONS TO SOLICITOR GENERAL ALLMAND, IN CHARGE OF
RCMP, WILL CONTINUE.

3. WHATEVER THE OUTCOME OF THIS AFFAIR, IT IS NOTEWORTHY
AS PRACTICALLY THE FIRST SUGGESTION OF HIGH-LEVEL SCANDAL
SINCE TRUDEAU BECAME PRIME MINISTER IN 1968. THIS REMARKABLE
RECORD IS NOT IN CANADIAN TRADITION. JOHN DIEFENBAKER'S
REGIME WAS ROCKED BY FLORID AND OCCASIONALLY HILARIOUS
SEX AND SPY STORIES (THE GERDAY MUNSINGER AFFAIR)
AND LESTER PERARSON'S ADMINISTRATION
SUFFERED THROUGH SEVERAL ACCUSATIONS OF CORRUPTION,
ONE RESULTING IN RESIGNATION OF JUSTICE MINISTER FAVREAU.
PROVINCIAL POLITICS, PERHAPS MOST NOTABLE IN QUEBEC
AND NEWFOUNDLAND, ARE FREQUENTLY PUNCTUATED BY
REVELATIONS OF SHADY PRACTICES. BUT THOUGH THERE HAVE BEEN
INSTANCES OF INEPTITUDE AND BAD JUDGMENT UNDER TRUDEAU,
THERE HAS BEEN HARDLY A WHIFF OF PERSONAL IMPROPRIETY.
SEVERAL WELL-PUBLICIZED JAIL BREAKS HELPED SHIFT SOLICITOR
GENERAL GOYER TO LESS EXPOSED MINISTRY OF SUPPLY AND
SERVICES IN 1972. TRUDEAU'S LIFESTYLE PRIOR TO HIS
MARRIAGE WAS OFTEN DESCRIBED AS FLAMBOYANT, BUT
PECCADILLOES, IF ANY, WERE CARRIED ON WITH ENORMOUS
DISCRETION. MARGARET TRUDEAU ACCEPTED AN EXPENSIVE
CAMERA FROM KING HUSSEIN AND APPARENTLY DID NOT PAY
CUSTOMS DUTY, AND TRUDEAU HAS BEEN CRITICIZED FOR
ACCEPTING A SWIMMING POOL IN THE OFFICIAL RESIDENCE
FROM AN ANONYMOUS GROUP OF BUSINESSMEN. THESE ARE VERY
SLIM PICKINGS, AND OPPOSITION AND PRESS HAVE FOCUSED
ON MUNRO'S POSSIBLE IMMERSION IN HAMILTON HARBOR AFFAIRS
WITH EVIDENT RELISH.
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